

# Friends of Brandon Wood New Year Newsletter 2018



## A happy new year to all our members.

### Butterflies in Brandon Wood

Throughout Warwickshire, 2017 was not a very good year for butterflies and, to a large extent, the butterfly population in Brandon Wood, reflected that of the county. Countrywide, there has been a general decline in butterfly populations over the past few years. The reason for this is not fully understood but is often attributed to cold wet periods in spring and summer. An unusually warm spring can cause food plants to grow out of synchronisation with the lifecycle of a particular butterfly. Without its favourite food, many butterflies will fail to flourish unless they are able to adapt and discover alternative food sources.

In Brandon Wood, butterfly numbers have generally been down in comparison to 2016. However, it is not all doom and gloom! The **Speckled Wood** butterfly was more prevalent in 2017 in our wood although down in numbers in Warwickshire as a whole.



**Speckled Wood**



**Silver Washed Fritillary**

We were pleased to see occasional **Silver-washed Fritillary** continuing to enjoy the sunny areas of the wood. Brimstone, Ringlet, Green-veined White, Small and Large White, and late in the season, Red Admirals appeared in the better weather.

## Butterflies in Brandon Wood cont.

Our biggest surprise was the sighting of a **Purple Emperor**. This magnificent large butterfly graced us with its presence on the morning after a Moth survey had been carried out in the wood. Just as the equipment was being dismantled, a Purple Emperor landed on one of the participants

Purple Emperors are large and dark with white banded wings. The male has a purple sheen. Most of their lives are spent in the treetops in wooded landscapes where they feed on aphid honeydew and tree sap. Males occasionally descend to the ground to probe for salts on paths or animal dung. This is most likely the reason our Purple Emperor was near the ground.

Purple Emperors lay their eggs in August and then the caterpillar stage lasts from about September to early June. You might see the caterpillars feeding on Goat Willow, also known as 'pussy willow'. The chrysalis stage is reached in June to July with the butterflies appearing in July/August. If you are in the wood in summer, look up in the trees – you might be lucky enough to see one!



**Purple Emperor**

## Contamination of Storm Drains

Part of the surface water drainage system for Binley Woods empties into Brandon Wood. The outflow pipe is at the back of the flats, at the end of Woodlands Road. Over the last few months there have been a number of occasions when this drain has been contaminated with paint thinners. This is a problem because this storm drain pipe empties into the brook which runs past the allotments along the northern edge of the wood and on into Dell Pool. Along with the potential ecological damage, these incidents have caused they also pose a risk to both wildlife and dogs being walked in the wood. The only way to deal with such pollution is to prevent it, once it is in the water system it is too late. To help us prevent this happening, please report to Severn Trent any contamination of the brook by the flats or if you spot anyone pouring something down the drain.

## Ash Dieback Update

Earlier this year the results were published of a £1.4m Government funded research project aimed at finding ash trees which are tolerant to the disease. In order to do this, researchers first had to identify specific genes which could indicate tolerance in Danish Ash trees and then uses those genes to try to identify tolerant trees in the UK. The result of all this work is "Betty". Betty is a mature ash tree in a Norfolk Wildlife Trust Woodland which the genetic markers predict to have a very high tolerance to Ash Dieback. Betty is Currently healthy despite being adjacent to infected trees. With cases of Ash Dieback identified across 43.7% of the UK, trees like Betty might just be the answer to preserving one of our most abundant native trees.



**Ash Tree "Betty"**

## Dunsmore Living Landscape

For the past couple of years the Friends have been working with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and other parties on a bid to the National Lottery for projects to enhance the natural landscape in the area between Rugby, Coventry, Leamington and Coombe Abbey. The bid was successful and now the projects are being implemented over the next four years.

The name used in the bid was Princethorpe Woodlands Living Landscapes but now it is thought that this is too narrow a name for what we are about so it is now called Dunsmore Living Landscape. Dunsmore is a historic name for the area between Rugby and Coventry so more appropriate to the projects being carried out. You will see this name appearing throughout the area.

## Dunsmore Living Landscape cont.

As far as Brandon Wood is concerned, we have virtually completed the first project which was to fence our western boundary by the railway and provide access gates.



This proved to be quite difficult as the fence is on the edge of the landfill and so it was mostly rubble just under the surface of the soil. Consequently all 70 posts had to be dug rather than knocked in and even digging was a trial. The project will be completed by changing the kissing gate at the Ferndale Road entrance to a radar gate.

The second project is to improve the Green Pond on the eastern boundary of the wood. Water flows into the pond

from the farmer's field and hence has chemicals in it that encourage the growth of the pond weed that blankets the pond. Our plan is to provide a reed bed filter where the water comes into the pond which will extract the chemicals from the water before it flows into the pond. This work has to be done in mid winter whilst the wildlife that live in the pond are hibernating in the surrounding area.

## Woodland Management

The pine thinning by contractors will now have been completed for the winter season- part of our plans for continual improvement of the woodland health and diversity- although such operations creates much work for our volunteers in clearing up brash by chipping, and dealing with brambles and bracken afterwards.

We hope users of the wood have not been inconvenienced by minor path closures during these times.

Walkers in the wood may have noticed some boundary fence posts and rails at possible unauthorised access points. We did this to deter motor cyclists, who have been finding their way into the wood through some obscure places. Let's hope this measure keeps motor cyclists out of the wood. Do please report any machines being driven in the wood, for the sake of members and visitors who enjoy peace and quiet, especially the elderly, and those with dogs and children. (Call 101).

The damaged kissing gate at Ferndale Road entrance will be replaced shortly with a RADAR gate for the convenience of wheelchair and motorised scooter users. (RADAR – Royal Association for Disability Rights).

My usual thanks go to the work parties, not only for their industrious labours but for working as good humoured positive teams, which is so important for us as volunteers.

**Andrew Ireland**



**Rain – no problem – We have the gear!**



### Fire in the Wood

Someone started a fire in the wood earlier in the year and you can see the damage that it caused in the picture to the left. Fortunately it was quickly spotted and the fire brigade came and put it out. The wood has now recovered and you can hardly notice that it had happened.

As previously reported, we need to keep an eye on fire risks from trees near houses bordering the wood, and if major work becomes necessary we'll keep nearby residents informed.

### Nature Notes

Every month John Sells, one of our trustees, writes his comments on the wildlife in Brandon Wood and these are posted on our website for all to read and enjoy. This is recommended reading. Below are the Nature Notes for December 2017.

The compensation for a dull misty November is the brilliant autumn colours as the deciduous trees prepare for winter. Every year the woods seem brighter than previously, possibly due to the warmer days, lack of frost and not too many gales. With practice one can distinguish many trees by the shades of yellow and orange of their leaves. My favourite is the Beech of which there are only a few in Brandon Wood (several near the Scout Pond), though the Larch, our only deciduous conifer, runs it close. Even the much maligned Bracken is more colourful this year.

Preparatory work on the Green Pond to enable it to be dredged has resulted in a lower water level which in turn has encouraged a Grey Wagtail (a dull name for an attractive bird) to take up residence, though it is easily disturbed. Muntjac deer have been more active recently with several young keeping close to their mother. They can have two litters (each of one fawn) a year in any month with a gestation period of seven months. The rut is a low key affair with most families keeping together. Unlike the larger deer they do little damage to trees but can disturb the understorey.

In last month's Notes I mentioned funnel mushrooms growing in rings and a semicircle of Clouded Funnels has appeared next to the nursery in Monks Road. The individual toadstools are notably large. Other fungi noticed on local lawns are Ivory Bonnet (small white with a hint of yellow) and Field Blewits.

### Photographer Wanted— can you help?

We have been having fixed-point photos of the wood taken four times per year to keep a visual record of long term changes. Our regular photographer, John Sidey, has had to give this up, and we are looking for continuity. **Can you help?** Please contact any trustee, the website or our Facebook page for more information. See contact details below.

#### *Follow the 'Woodland' Code:*

#### ***Remember to treat 'our' woodland with respect.***

Protect plants and animals and take your litter home

Keep to the designated paths

Keep dogs under close control and pick up after them

Ensure you are wearing suitable footwear and clothing

Consider other people—give a greeting and a smile!

### ***Need some firewood?***

Call **Andrew Kirby** on **07976 266208**

for good quality timber from our woodland

### **FoBW Contact Details**

Phone	03 301 239 215
Web site	<a href="http://www.brandonwood.org">www.brandonwood.org</a>
Facebook	FriendsBrandonWood
e-mail	<a href="mailto:info.brandonwood@gmail.com">info.brandonwood@gmail.com</a>